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27 April 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director of Personnel

THROUGH : Deputy Director of Personnel for Plans and Control

SUBJECT : Reverse Fitness Reports

REFERENCE : Memo fr Junior Officers Study Group dtd 13 Apr 73,
same subject

1. This is in response to your request for comment on the referent which urges that the Agency consider systems for evaluations of managers by their professional and clerical subordinates and evaluations by their fellow workers of all employees under consideration for managerial positions.

2. The proposal seems to be based on the study group's concern with an apparent lack of attention to the quality of management and supervision. Since members of the group are exposed to management practices throughout the Agency it can be presumed that they consider the problem a general one. The study group's observations ring true that "in most cases the branch chief enjoys autonomy as long as the division chief is pleased with the staff's performance" and "... subordinates are reluctant to complain through normal channels for fear of reprisals..." A clear illustration of such branch chief autonomy has just come to our attention through an employee suggestion. It involved a crude but elaborate "trait" rating system which a branch chief had imposed on his subordinates quite contrary to Agency concepts of performance evaluation. There is ample evidence that employees who have joined the organization in recent years find the managerial style of the Agency uncomfortable and that they are seeking opportunities for greater recognition and increased participation in running the Agency.

3. The idea of "reverse" evaluations is not new. From time to time circumstances emerge which make it desirable for management to tap the opinions and attitudes of subordinates toward their superiors, or, as in training situations, to solicit peer comments on the leadership potential of fellow trainees. However, our recent review of the literature in this field shows that the systematic practice of such actions on a regular formal basis is indeed rare.

4. In paragraph 6 the referent notes a few of the difficulties in implementing the proposed evaluations. There are many others which the Agency would also have to resolve if it were to seriously consider such action. For example:

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a. Although standards can be established (either by direction or through participative development of objectives) against which individual performance can be evaluated, there is no way for subordinates to establish measurable standards of conduct and productivity for their superiors. By virtue of their positions these superiors are accountable to higher levels of management for the individual and collective productivity of the employees whom they supervise.

b. The difficulties in having supervisors submit objective evaluations of the performance of their subordinates are well known. Due to the greater possibility of reprisals it would be far more difficult for subordinates to be objective in recording evaluations of their superiors. Necessarily the human factors involved would tend to make reverse evaluations even less reliable than those which supervisors record on employees under our present system. It would also be next to impossible to preserve the anonymity of reverse evaluations if it were decided to solicit them on that basis.

c. Management would be unable to assess the influence of personality factors in reverse evaluations. Employees would be inclined to evaluate their supervisors' behavior in terms of their personal preferences which might not match management's objectives. Further, such preferences would not necessarily relate to the style of supervision which would be best suited to productive activity in a given work situation.

5. We agree with the study group that the Agency should identify and correct deficiencies in supervisory and managerial performance. However, the process of reorienting the Agency's ingrained managerial style will be difficult and time-consuming. Significant change in this area can come about only through conscious intelligent effort to develop a more open managerial style which can accept legitimate confrontation and which will encourage working groups to exercise individual initiative in defining and pursuing their objectives within Agency goals.

6. We do not believe that the introduction of a formal program of peer evaluation or reverse fitness reports would significantly improve the management practices which concern the junior officer study group. In our opinion such programs would only stimulate resentment and mistrust in the managerial hierarchy. They would strengthen resistance to change and retard progress toward the improvements which the study group is seeking.

[Redacted]

Chief, Review Staff

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